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SUBJECT: FRENCH RESPOND TO U.S. BELARUS POLICY DEMARCHE,
COMMENT ON BILATERAL SECURITY TALKS WITH RUSSIA

REF: STATE 188900

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT, FOR REAS
ONS 1.4 B/D

¶1. (C) On October 20, Poloff spoke with Aurelia Bouchez, DAS-equivalent for Russia and the former Soviet space, to discuss reftel demarche on U.S. policy toward Belarus. Bouchez said France was pleased with U.S./EU cooperation regarding Belarus, and called for further in-depth consultations during the pre-election period. Although it had some bilateral programs, France addressed Belarus issues largely within the EU, said Bouchez. France is pushing for an EU focus on Belarus civil society, believing this is the best long-term solution to encourage the growth of democracy.

In this, said Bouchez, the EU and the U.S. have complementary approaches. Bouchez added that the EU needed to engage Belarus civil society and push for democratization in a spirit of complete openness, so that neither Belarus nor Russia could accuse Western countries of encouraging insurrection. As an aside, Bouchez intimated that France was worried certain EU countries "in the region" were covertly supporting opposition parties. This, she said, was "very dangerous." (Note: From the context and examples Bouchez gave, it appeared she was referring to Poland. End note)

¶2. (C) Turning to recent bilateral talks between France and Russia on security issues, Bouchez said FM Douste-Blazy had raised French concerns regarding Belarus, to which Russian FM Lavrov replied that Polish minorities in Belarus were better treated than Russian minorities in the EU Baltic states. Despite this and several other "heavy" exchanges, Bouchez said the talks went well and covered the full range of current international issues, including Iran, Iraq, North Korea and Russian cooperation with the EU. Russia complained again, said Bouchez, that the EU-Russia relationship was not as strong as the NATO-Russia relationship. Both countries agreed on the need to conduct negotiations that would focus on improving EU-Russian cooperation by 2007, although no format was agreed upon.

¶3. (C) Regarding the "frozen conflicts," Lavrov again clearly warned that Kosovo independence could lead to similar results in the Georgian separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. According to Bouchez, FM Lavrov also commented on Uzbekistan, saying that Russia didn't approve of Karimov's regime but expected that Uzbekistan's increased involvement in the CIS would give Russia greater influence to help further democracy in Uzbekistan. Greater Uzbek ties to the CIS and Russia are exactly what France fears, said Bouchez.

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